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What are Soft and Hard Skills?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completing this chapter, you will be able to

- Explain soft and hard skills and the difference between these two.
- Appreciate the importance of soft skills.
- Learn to blend both soft and hard skills.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1. Soft and Hard Skills
2. Academic Example
3. Significance of Soft Skills

Studies by Stanford Research Institute and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation among Fortune 500 CEOs found that 75% of long term job success depended on people skills and only 25% on technical skills.

Michael joined as a project manager in a multinational company. Michael had huge knowledge base about his trade. He had twelve people reporting to him. He had to coordinate and work with his people for completion of projects. Michael was excited about his role as a project leader and it was a challenge for him. In the previous organization he worked as a team member and was reporting to project manager. This was a challenge for Michael as he was to lead the team and prove himself as a project manager.

He began assigning the roles and responsibilities to his team members and coordinating with them. However, he found it

Soft skills not only help the people at the entry level but also at the senior level as these interpersonal skills are essential from bottom to top.

Hard skills are useful in a specific area of activity. However the soft skills are useful in all areas of activity. There is a limit to hard skills but not for soft skills. Besides, soft skills are useful not only in your professional life but also in your personal and social life. However, hard skills can be used at the workplace alone thus limiting the scope for hard skills.

Hard skills may get defunct over a period of time due to the changing technology. But soft skills stay on forever. Besides, the importance of soft skills will increase due to the growing complexity as people need to be dealt with lot of care and caution to get the tasks executed effectively and efficiently.

Academic Example

“Harvard University stated that someone’s achievements in career are 80% determined by soft skills and only 20% determined by hard skills.”

For instance, if teachers are good at hard skills and weak in soft skills, they cannot become successful teachers. The teachers may have lot of knowledge about the subject they teach. There is no point when they are weak in communication skills and interpersonal skills and poor in handling their students. They might have huge knowledge base. What happens when they don’t know how to make use of that knowledge for the benefit of students? The students can understand and appreciate the knowledge of the teachers only when the teachers share their knowledge effectively. They also praise the teachers when they mix freely with students.

Significance of Soft Skills

“The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives.” – Anthony Robbins

Soft skills help you become a successful professional. These skills help in fine-tuning your personality. These are the skills that help you present yourself professionally. These are the skills that make leaders stand out from the pack.

Being good at soft skills promotes better relations among the people. It minimizes the gap across various departments in an organization thus promoting effective communication and performance. Soft skills close the barriers and build the bridges

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among the people at workplace. All these things ultimately lead to better productivity and performance.

The mushrooming knowledge workers and the growing services sectors led to the challenging work environment which needs soft skills badly. The growing human interaction at the workplace led people to work in teams for achieving organizational goals. It would not be possible without equipping the people with soft skills. Finally soft skills help you grow as a true human being.

At the personal front, soft skills build self-esteem and self-confidence among the individuals. These ensure both personal and professional advancement for the individuals. At the professional front, these create lot of opportunities both for the employees and employers. Handling difficult people becomes easier with these skills in organizations. Handling and negotiating with clients promotes business opportunities for the employers. Companies can outsmart their rivals. For students, these skills enable employment opportunities as the recruiters look for plug-and-play recruits.

Takeaways

“In today’s competitive environment, it is not enough to be the best in your field, intellectually. Competency is only half of what you need to climb the ladder of success. The other half is the softer side of you – it’s that part of you that will be liked, admired, trusted and remembered.”

– Carole Nicola Ides.

Although there is more significance attached to soft skills, hard skills are also equally important along with soft skills to excel as competent and successful professionals. Therefore, you need to blend both soft and hard skills for becoming a successful personality.

KEY TERMS

Hard skills

Soft skills

Brainstorming Exercises/Activities:

- Define briefly about soft and hard skills
- Differentiate between soft and hard skills
- Explain the significance of soft skills
- Narrate few incidents where people failed at workplace due to lack of soft skills